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Aspect of Post Colonialism in the Selected Works of Uma Parameswaran

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Abstract:

The enhanced process of globalization, cross-fertilization and transculturation has brought many changes all over the world. People started moving to Western countries for a better life, economy, education etc., and it has provided opportunities for them to grow in spite of having controversial issues in the alien land. They face alienation, uprootedness and loneliness with the resultant development of discrimination, intergenerational conflicts and cultural dilemmas. Migrants become emblematic figures in postcolonial literary studies which seek emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class. As post colonial writer Uma Parameswaran's works reflect the voices of the immigrants who have registered their protest and their feelings against discrimination and the denial of their rights.

Keywords: Displacement, Subjugation, Marginality, Hybridity.

To identify the uniqueness and generosity of a particular work of art, a scholar needs the aid of literary theory since it lays down certain principles of literature which describe the features and forms that make up the literary work. Post colonial writings reflect the socio symbolic dimensions of the changed culture. In general, Post colonial writing refers to the literature written after the end of colonial rule or the enforced mass migrations of the slave trade because of the impact of colonialism upon indigenous societies. Some critics feel that post colonialism is used both as literal description of colonial societies as well as the global condition after colonialism. Whatever it may be, it helps in the analysis of certain crucial aspects of human life like journeying, loss, the search for identity, the arrival of the stranger, the global conditions and eventually the role of the intellectuals of the third world.

According to Post colonialism every nation has been colonized at some point of time or other. Even England itself is a post colonial nation having been conquered by Romans and Normans. In fact colonialism has ransacked the history, culture and the political socio-economic matrix of the colonized nations. Post colonialism represents an attitude to resist colonialism so as to reclaim an autonomous and free identity. It discusses many problems related to the hybridization of culture, universalism, language, cross-cultural recovery and suppression of indigenous tradition. Post colonial writers not only focus on the struggle of the native people who want to adjust themselves with the new culture of the colonizer, but also deal with the problems of crossed identity and the raging hatred in the part of the colonizer's surface in the consciousness of the colonized people. They stressed on the necessity of regenerating the dead spirit and self-respect, shedding off the oppressive influence of colonization and depicting to the world at large, the native's own identity and achievement. Through their writing postcolonial

writers have awakened the ignorant, inert masses from their slumber of shackles of subjugation. Many critics feel that even literatures of Canada, US and Australia should be expanded under post colonialism. The post colonial theorists and various critics such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi. K.Bhabha, Gayathri Spivak have dwelt upon the changes that have taken place due to postcolonialism and how it has affected people who leave their homeland both physically and metaphorically.

The themes of post colonial writing like migration, existential crisis like alienation, rootlessness, displacement and hybridity can be correlated with diasporic writing. Uma Parameswaran a postcolonial writer discusses the lives and experiences of Indian immigrants in Canada who have registered their protest and their feelings against discrimination and the denial of their rights . Parameswaran's protagonists are the victims of despair and loneliness in the host society. Through her writings the readers become aware not only of the South Asian experience but also of the struggles of the immigrants that make them more humane. This paper would discuss the Post colonial aspects like 'ambivalence' and 'hybridity' which give a set of perspectives about the relation between ideas and practices, relations of harmony and conflict between different peoples and cultures the immigrants' face in the course of their life.

Uma Parameswaran's writings comprised of different genres which include short stories, plays and poems with common themes which juxtapose her Western experience with the Indian realities. In her play named *Dear Deedi, My Sister*, she discusses the lives and experiences of Indian immigrants as they struggle hard to adjust and cope with the new atmosphere of the new land. In order to survive in the alien place, a school boy named Ilago from Philippines asks his mother to change his name to Jim or David

Ma, you think you could change my name

To Jim or David or something . . .

It would be nice to be white,

More like everyone else

You know? (64-65)

The immigrants in these situations are forced to feel that they stand on the borderline belonging neither to their homeland nor to their foster country. In their attempt to merge with the host culture while preserving their heritage, they develop a double identity and their culture becomes a sandwich culture. This double identity has been expressed by Homi. K.Bhabha in his article on Postcolonial Criticism, "A doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once which makes it impossible . . . to accept the invitation to identity: 'You are a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different . . . It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different' – to be different from those that are different makes you the same – that the unconscious speaks of the form of otherness . . ." (228)

The immigrants' dilemmas, predicaments, contradictions, paradoxes, complexities have been a predominant idea in postcolonial writers as they seek emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class. Uma Parameswaran's novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* and her poem *Trishanku* portray the 'in-between' condition of the immigrants.

The immigrant children feel lonely in their schools even though they are in a crowd and they cry out in anguish. They have no freedom to take leave or speak against the system. Even jobs are denied to the immigrants. The instinct for survival is always the ultimate moving force for the immigrants but as time passes, there are series of mergers and divisions between the older and newer set of values and hence they form a hybrid society. For postcolonial writers the hybrid society has given a lot of exposure and makes the immigrants to adjust, adapt, to develop positive attitude as well as tolerance in the host society. S.Sujatha in her article on “Shifting Identities: Problems and Possibilities – A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction” has commented on the views of Homi. K.Bhabha regarding hybridity:

Hybridization is a kind of negotiation, both political and cultural, between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha considers hybridization of cultures as the focal point of post colonialism. This hybridization which is ever existent in our society has been dealt extensively by the diasporic fraternity. Hybridisation is an important part of our contemporary life and literature and a cause for fragmentation either at the individual level or at the social. (145)

Like Bhabha, Edward Said also underlined the change due to ‘cultural hybridity’ which has come to stay; it has always been clear that no amount of effort can completely separate the East from the West. The strategy that accounts for cultural shock of a migrant is that he tries to construct multiple identities and develops a hybrid vision which eventually becomes an ongoing process of adaptation. Migrants become emblematic figures in post colonial literary studies because they represent a removal from ‘old’ foundations and from previous ‘grounded’ ways of thinking about identity. As postcolonial critics emphasise on marginality, plurality and perceived ‘otherness’ seen as source of energy and potential change, it helps in strengthening the bonds between various countries and they begin to relate through historical, cultural, social, traditional and economic ties.

The next important aspect of postcolonial writing is ‘ambivalence’. Homi.K.Bhabha in his article on “Postcolonial Criticism” describes ‘ambivalence’ as “a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized” (232). Living on margins, trying to perform the role of an ambassador and a refugee, the diasporic writer seeks affirmation and reaffirmation in a new perspective. In the alien place when the immigrants travel in a bus, their identity has been threatened by the natives. The questions who are you? Where are you from? Why are you here? make the immigrants to establish their identity in an impersonal and threatening social milieu. In *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Tree* Jayant says, “It’s a strange, eerie feeling, all those discreetly questioning eyes that make me ask endless questions” (103). Adjusting with the social, economic, political, psychological and environmental changes is a challenge. The sudden change in the lifestyle, culture, status and society causes emotional and psychological problems. This creates an ambivalent situation in the immigrant’s life. This is clearly brought out in the conversation between Jayant and Jyothi :

JYOTHI. As for dating local style, we have to change with time. Haven’t we been in the closet long enough? I don’t mean just girls. All of us.

JAYANT.(Half mockingly) Say, that’s profound, ain’t it ? We have to change. Sounds

so good when you say it, and yet you know what? Just the other day someone
said just the opposite and it sounded even better. (97)

Here, Uma Parameswaran says that not all immigrants are ready to change their nature just to become friends with the whites. As far as Parameswaran is concerned, the immigrant spaces are homogenous; they depend on how they adjust and adapt to the new environment and nation.

Today, migration is a movement marked by human propensity to greener pastures under the impact of globalization. The immigrants' movement which begins as a journey of adventure marked by the hope of a bright future gradually turns less and less adventurous because what they face in reality is an entirely different situation. This makes the immigrant to suffer neurosis, an anxiety resulting in ghettoisation – a herd instinct, very much visible and prevalent in animal kingdom. This ambivalent situation gives the immigrant the necessary impetus to chisel his identity resisting erasure into collective anonymity. In fact the main purpose of immigration is to get a better job or to have better education in host society. But in reality the condition is different. Jobs are denied to immigrants. Even in educational institutions children are discriminated against and they cry out in anguish. Uma Parameswaran expresses this ambivalent situation in her Play named *Dear Deedi, My Sister*

It will not be easy, some said,
And it has not, as we all know
Who have worked hard or worse still,
Have no work at all, though willing
And waiting for the break . . . (72- 73)

These lines describe how immigrants feel disillusioned. Every line of the play reflects a real – life situation and hints at the injustice in the system and the community. It reflects their pathetic condition in the alien society. They have no freedom to take leave or speak against the system. The instinct for survival is always the ultimate moving force for the immigrants. On the one hand, they long for home because of racism and hostility; but on the other, this longing is often counter acted by the fear of home because home means recognition of failed expectations and disappointment in oneself. The ambivalent situation has been portrayed in one of her short stories *The Door I Shut behind Me* a young graduate Chander goes to Canada and expresses his first impression of being in a new country : “ I don't expect to be here that long. I just want to pick up some work experience and go back home” (10). But, for others, their intention is entirely different. They feel that they get recognition and individuality only in an alien land. In another situation when Chander's friend points to an illustrated advertisement of a night club and asks him “How about going to one of these joints after dinner?” (5). Chander replies that he is not interested. This shows that the immigrants are not ready to enjoy the luxuries of life, though they get chances to do it. Immigrants when they move to other countries are leaving their aspirations, close knit family system, faith towards religion and customs, traditional way of life and it has been reiterated by the author as, “When we leave our country we shut many doors behind us though we are not aware of it at the time . . . There are many doors ahead of us” (15). Here the 'door' represents many things like their imagination, aspiration, tradition, culture, aestheticism,

belief in themselves and the hope to receive the same from the other side. The issues of oppression, subjugation, discrimination and also the dilemma of the immigrant lives clearly reveal the ambivalent situation of the immigrants' life.

The world is moving at a fast pace and people are exploring possibilities of settling down in various continents with the intention of satisfying their intellectual, psychological as well as emotional needs. With a lot of hope and aspirations, the immigrants settle in their host society. But in reality they have to struggle hard to find a place in the alien country. Sometimes, the transition and displacement bring about a feeling of insecurity in children. They soon overcome it; accept not only the new place but also the customs and habits associated with the adopted country. As far as the immigrants are concerned, they want to survive in the adopted country with confidence and unity among themselves even though they are rootless. Everything looks green and beautiful at a distance in the adopted country; yet they have hurdles in achieving their target. As postcolonial critics emphasize on marginality, plurality and perceived 'otherness' seen as source of energy and potential change, it helps in strengthening bonds between various countries and they begin to relate through historical, cultural, social, traditional and economic ties.

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